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Army secrets



Times file photo

The cave-dwelling gray bat is on the endangered species list.



Carucha L. Meuse/Huntsville Times

Staff ecologist Gabbie Ehinger talks about Price's potato bean plant, one of several endangered species on Redstone Arsenal.

Redstone's secrecy protects endangered species



Carucha L. Meuse/Huntsville Times

Officials at Redstone Arsenal moved quickly to preserve the endangered Price's potato beans found growing in 1995.

Officials say telling site of species often leads to vandalism

By **SHELBY G. SPIRES**
Times Aerospace Writer
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At the bottom of a limestone cave on Redstone Arsenal lives one of North Alabama's strangest and most fragile life forms – the eyeless, clear-skinned Alabama cave shrimp. It's one of Redstone's lesser known residents fighting for life.

The cave shrimp is one of

eight species of animal and plant life on the 38,000-acre arsenal that are listed on the federal government's endangered species list. The list includes plants like dwarf trillium, Harper's umbrella plant, and Price's potato bean, along with animals like the American alligator and gray bat and fish like the Tuscumbia darter.

At the bottom of the 30-foot-deep cave – one of the Army's closely held secrets in Huntsville for fear that the cave

A list of the endangered or threatened species at Redstone. Page A9

will be pillaged by curious novelty hunters – the shrimp live in a pool of water shut off from light. A federally protected life form, the Alabama cave shrimp thrives in deep, dark and dank spaces, and like most creatures that don't come out into the sun, it has no eyes and little coloring.

"It's a small, small shrimp that is barely larger than a penny and very fragile. It lives here in a cave," said Gabbie

Please see **REDSTONE** on A9

Senators seek more Iraq troops

Poll shows 55% oppose sending more U.S. forces

By **RONALD BROWNSTEIN**
and **RICHARD SIMON**
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON – President Bush faced intensified pressure Sunday to commit more troops to Iraq, even as administration officials argued that the existing deployment is sufficient and a new poll showed that nearly half of Americans want to withdraw the forces already in the field.

Appearing on Sunday television shows, several senators

from both parties called on Bush to bolster forces in Iraq and accelerate efforts to restore basic services to the war-ravaged nation.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., returning from a trip to Iraq, called on Bush to send "at least another division" – which could mean an additional 17,000 troops.

"We are in a very serious situation, a race against time," McCain, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee,

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Monument may move; Moore won't

Suspended chief justice to make appearance today

From staff and wire reports

MONTGOMERY – Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore today was to continue his nationwide appeal to keep his Ten Commandments monument in the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building.

Moore was scheduled to speak at 3 p.m. on the steps of the judicial building, his first public appearance since being suspended Friday by a state judicial ethics panel for disobeying a federal court order. There was still no indication this morning when the monument might be moved,

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Associated Press

Joyce Fecteau of Huntsville holds a crucifix Sunday during a sermon on the steps of the state judicial building in Montgomery.

U.S. bombs kill about 50 Taliban in Afghanistan

Jet attack destroys camp near border with Pakistan

By **NOOR KHAN**

The Associated Press

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – U.S. jets bombed an area of southeastern Afghanistan today, killing as many as 50 Taliban guerrillas, a provincial government spokesman said.

There was no immediate confirmation of a U.S. attack or of the extent of any casualties. In Washington, the Pentagon had no immediate comment.

The attack was part of joint operations between the U.S. military and local Afghan militia hunting down Taliban fighters blamed for a series of attacks mostly in the south and east of the country, according to

Ahmad Khan, a spokesman for the governor of Zabul province.

Khan said Afghan forces collected the bodies of at least 50 Taliban fighters after the bombardment. The bombing destroyed a Taliban mountain camp near the border with Pakistan, he said.

Earlier, Afghan officials about 100 people had been arrested in the last few days in the hunt for suspected Taliban officials.

Operations in Paktika and Zabul provinces follow a wave of attacks by suspected Taliban against police stations and government forces in the past two weeks. The violence has killed dozens of people and has cast a shadow over efforts to rebuild the war-battered country.

Please see **TALIBAN** on A9



Associated Press

Indian fireman and policemen inspect the scene of a bomb blast at the Gateway of India area in Bombay this morning.

Bombay bombs kill 44 and wound 150

Blasts are on day of report on disputed religious site

By **RAMOLA TALWAR BADAM**
The Associated Press

BOMBAY, India – Car bombs exploded at a crowded jewelry market and a historic landmark in Bombay today, killing at least 44 people, wounding 150 others and shaking buildings in India's financial capital.

The bombs, hidden in the trunks of two taxis, blew up within five minutes of each other, police said. Several people were being interrogated, including one taxi driver.

Police were focusing their investigation on Muslim mili-



Sources: ESRI; Associated Press

tant groups.

"There are many jihadi groups out, let loose by the enemy country," said Ranjit Sharma, a police commission-

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Redstone's secrecy protects endangered species

Officials say telling site of species often leads to vandalism
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By SHELBY G. SPIRES

Times Aerospace Writer shelbys@htimes.com

At the bottom of a limestone cave on Redstone Arsenal lives one of North Alabama's strangest and most fragile life forms - the eyeless, clear-skinned Alabama cave shrimp. It's one of Redstone's lesser known residents fighting for life. The cave shrimp is one of eight species of animal and plant life on the 38,000-acre arsenal that are listed on the federal government's endangered species list. The list includes plants like dwarf trillium, Harper's umbrella plant, and Price's potato bean, along with animals like the American alligator and gray bat and fish like the Tuscumbia darter. At the bottom of the 30-foot-deep cave - one of the Army's closely held secrets in Huntsville for fear that the cave will be pillaged by curious novelty hunters - the shrimp live in a pool of water shut off from light. A federally protected life form, the Alabama cave shrimp thrives in deep, dark and dank spaces, and like most creatures that don't come out into the sun, it has no eyes and little coloring. "It's a small, small shrimp that is barely larger than a penny and very fragile. It lives here in a cave," said Gabbie Ehinger, a Redstone staff ecologist who keeps up with Redstone's rare and endangered life. "There's just not that many of them, and that's one reason we monitor" the shrimp. 'It's a federal law' Managing the details of Redstone's protected plants and animals is the job of Daniel Dunn, chief of Redstone's Natural Resources Division. Dunn is pretty emphatic when explaining why there's a need to keep tabs on the endangered species. "It's a federal law. That's it first and foremost," said Dunn, who has worked in the natural resources division since 1991. "The law says we will do this and that agencies have to meet certain guidelines." Passed in 1973, the Endangered Species Act was sweeping legislation that made it a crime to harm or sell animals and plant life deemed protected by the federal government. The act, which has been amended several times, set up the legal framework to protect species near extinction. Because many military bases have closed off vast tracts of land over the years, they have become a refuge for numerous endangered species around the nation. Woodpeckers, cranes, alligators and plant life throughout the South have benefited from the protection of the Department of Defense. "Take a look around Redstone," Ehinger said. "This land would have been snapped up and turned into housing subdivisions, shopping centers and parking lots. If it weren't for Redstone Arsenal being protected as a federal installation, many of these species would not have a natural habitat here." An example: The endangered Price's potato bean was found growing near old Army storage buildings on Redstone in 1995. It covered less than 100 square feet on the side of a road. Dunn's office quickly moved to shut off the area and change the way groundskeepers mow the grass. "It worked, because now we've got more than half an acre growing around here," Dunn said. Once a dietary staple of settlers and Native Americans, the potato beans are found in only 13 known locations today. The potato beans don't grace the dinner table anywhere these days - at least not legally. It's a strange thought, but Dunn and his staff are quizzed regularly by friends and co-workers about the taste of the endangered species. It's a question that's bothersome to ecologists. "People always ask us if we eat the endangered species, and I don't really get why people would think that we do that," Ehinger said. "We don't eat the endangered species. That's not really a joke here." It would be an expensive meal, Dunn said. For every potato bean or shrimp or alligator a person wanted to turn into North Alabama cuisine, he could face a fine of \$25,000 and a year in jail. "That fine and jail sentence is per species. You pull out five shrimp and that comes to \$125,000 and maybe five years in jail depending on what the judge rules. That could get expensive really quickly," Dunn said. Monitoring people It's not just the people off the Army post who worry the Redstone natural resources office. Dunn, Ehinger and their colleagues in the 35-member Natural Resources Division have to monitor the people on Redstone as well. People were dumping trash and storing lawnmowers and gasoline near the potato bean site. Dunn's office convinced arsenal officials to tear down the buildings and put up a gate. Gating off areas seems to be the most successful way to protect endangered species like the potato beans and the cave shrimp. "Many times people don't mean any harm, but they disturb the natural habitat by moving around it and mowing the grass. We have some sites near the river, too, that we monitor, but people like to go to the river and swim and boat and fish," Dunn said. "Since I came here in 1991 we've been putting gates up trying to close those areas off to the people here. It's worked out well." Sometimes people do mean harm, though. The Redstone ecologists guard the habitat locations like they were state secrets. "We don't want people tempted to come here and take endangered species. It happens all the time in other areas, and for that reason the sites have to remain a secret," Dunn said. At one point natural habitats were listed in public records like the Federal Registry, but people would discover the locations and either disturb the habitats for curiosity or to steal the wildlife. Ehinger said "it's really a strange case of curiosity meeting vandalism when people take endangered species. It's strange in these cases, but people like to collect rare items. And by their definition endangered species are rare." To Dunn, the job of monitoring Redstone's protected life is not just about laws but about balance and responsibility, he said. "Everything that exists in nature in our world has a place," Dunn said. "The more you take out creates problems. At some point the ecosystem will collapse. "I don't believe just because we as humans are here, or any species for that matter, that means we have the right to destroy another species just to put up a building. "It's wonderful to enjoy natural places, but we also have a responsibility to protect them."

In trouble at the arsenal

08/25/03

Redstone Arsenal has eight major species of animals and plants that are either endangered or threatened: Listed as protected Alabama cave shrimp: According to the Fish & Wildlife Service, this Alabama cave shrimp is colorless and nearly transparent with a total length of up to 20 millimeters or .8 inches. The Alabama cave shrimp differs from most shrimp because of the almost equal length of its first and second legs, its spiny shell, and its unaffected and unpigmented eyes. It is endangered because the shrimp is known to live in two caves in Madison County and nowhere else. Gray bat: The Fish & Wildlife Service lists the gray bat as endangered because the bat colonies roost only in caves and cave-like habitats. Human disturbance and vandalism may have been primarily responsible for the decline. Listed as threatened or concerned American bald eagle: The bird is the official symbol of the United States, and several "stop over" at Redstone Arsenal while flying south for the winter. The bald eagle is found over most of North America, from Alaska and Canada to northern Mexico. About half of the world's 70,000 bald eagles live in Alaska. Combined with British Columbia's population of about 20,000, the northwest coast of North America is by far their greatest stronghold. Dead or dying fish are an important food source for all bald eagles. Price's potato bean: According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Price's potato bean was never a very common species due to its exacting habitat requirements, and only 13 populations of the plant are known to exist today. These are threatened by cattle which graze and trample on the plant. Timber clearcutting destroys its habitat and herbicides applied to highway rights-of-way kill individual populations of the plant. Almost half the known populations have disappeared in recent years. Tuscumbia darter: A small fish with gold specks on an olive brown back, the darter lives in springs along the Tennessee River. Poor water quality has placed the Tuscumbia darter on the endangered list. American alligator: The American alligator was once considered endangered, but populations are now recovering. The alligator is hunted for its skin which is used to produce boots, shoes, purses and wallets, to name a few products. Harper's umbrella plant: Harper's umbrella plant is an herbaceous perennial in the buckwheat family that dies after flowering and seed set. For the first four years, a basal rosette is all that can be seen of this plant. It has dark green leaves with a prominent central vein and a mat of creamy white hair on the lower surface, making them conspicuous among other vegetation. It is threatened because of human development. Dwarf trillium: Trillium plants are sometimes called wildflowers. Trillium blossoms consist of three green, lance-shaped sepals, or leaves, which alternate with three erect petals that display a wide range of colors. The dwarf trillium is threatened because its habitat is shrinking due to human development. Source: Redstone Arsenal Natural Resources Division and Fish & Wildlife Service.